

# The Washington Post

## La Traviata' from Opera International was well done overall

**By Robert Battey, Published: July 25**

[Opera International](#), a program of the Organization of Chinese American Women, has been mounting productions here since 1994. Sunday at the [Music Center at Strathmore](#), it offered an encore performance of its semi-staged "La Traviata" from last year, and overall, it was quite well done.

There was hardly a slip from the cast or the fine chorus, which was especially impressive given the logistics; the orchestra was on risers at the rear of the stage and, thus, conductor Edward Roberts had his back to the singers. This setup meant that there was no room for spontaneity; everything relied on steadiness and sticking together. This can be fatal in Verdi, and the musical flow was certainly inhibited, but the singing and playing were on a high enough level to overcome it.

The standout in the cast was Jessica Stecklein in the title role. Her voice may someday be even richer and deeper, but its quality was virtually ideal for Violetta. "Sempre Libera" fluttered effortlessly, and her outbursts in the third act somehow encompassed the dying consumptive while still singing full out. With her lissome build, she was physically believable as well.

Yingxi Zhang as Alfredo was almost as good. He moves well and produces a clear, clean sound, with no sense of strain up high. The voice did not handle the ornaments in "Libiamo" well, and he was slightly out of tune in his offstage interjections late in the scene. His diction, while correct, doesn't bite as much as Italian needs. But with his looks and his vocal talent, this young tenor is likely to have a good career. As Germont, Chen-Ye Yuan brought stentorian power but wooden acting and sometimes garbled diction.

The smaller roles were all strongly cast, particularly Jose Sacin as a firm Count. Muriel von Villas's direction was sharp and taut, making the most out of the nearly bare stage.

Battey is a freelance writer.